



Q&A with Forest Crooke, Natural Assets Manager, Stoneybrook GCC. Realistic Expectations Ensure Better Planting Successes.

Sue Remy, Ponds and Preserves Committee.

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Sarasota County's commitment to improving water quality has brought together leading experts and HOA community members to learn about the challenges we all face with our ponds and to share effective solutions. One local HOA community expert, **Forest Crooke, Natural Assets Manager, Stoneybrook Golf & Country Club (SGCC)**, recently shared his experiences about pond plantings around his community. Forest also personally visited Rivendell to see our planting progress and provided valuable insights we will use to finetune our pond planting strategy.

Q. Please tell us a bit about your community, your ponds, and your role.

A. Stoneybrook Golf & Country Club has approximately 470 acres with 167 acres of wetlands, wetland buffers, and upland preserves, and 58 acres of stormwater ponds. Over the past nine years as Ponds Manager, I have been managing the ponds and plantings here.



Forest Crooke, Natural Assets Manager, SGCC, & Bob Frank, P&P Chair.

Q. What are some of the lessons you have learned over the past nine years of installing plants around your ponds?

A. We have 36 stormwater ponds here in Stoneybrook and they all have different personalities. Some ponds are better at growing a particular aquatic species than others. Maybe only a particular species will grow in certain parts of the pond, or at a different water depth. Believe me, we have killed a lot of aquatic plants over the years trying to figure out where they want to grow and not grow. Having realistic expectations of your planting results goes a long way toward mitigating the disappointment of seeing plantings possibly falter. Even with what looks like a perfect planting, in perfect conditions, there are still things that you can't control that could affect the outcome. WHAT to plant, WHEN to plant, and WHERE to plant, are all factors to consider.



Q. Realistically, what plant survival rate is considered a good benchmark?

A. In a perfect world all of them will make it, but I already know that won't be the case. Out of a recent planting of 5,750 plants, if half or more survive, I will be ecstatic. If a quarter of them survive, I would be really pleased. If ten percent make it past the first season in a pond that originally had no plants, that would still be okay. The only time I would ever be disappointed is if none of them make it and I can't figure out why. The opportunity with any of these survival percentages is to learn which plants found their happy place and build on that success. In my mind, the return-on-investment says that makes a very successful pond planting.

Q. For optimal survival, when is the best time to install aquatic plants and where?

A. The best way for new aquatic plants to survive is to plant them on exposed pond bank when the ponds are low and at least 3-4 weeks before heavy summer rains raise the pond water levels above the root systems. Try to avoid planting underwater. Most young aquatic plants have little to no root systems when first planted. They need time to grow into the soil and get established. If pond water covers them at this stage, many can be dislodged by typical wind and ripples to become floaters. Plus, if the pond level rises before the plants can get established, algae can act like a life-preserver and uproot the plants by their necks. Avoid using chemical herbicides around new plantings.



The Rivendell P&P wishes to thank Forest Crooke for lending his valuable time and expertise. We are learning that pond planting is a process, with successes and disappointments. It is not a "plant once & done" solution. A successful planting strategy must also include a provision to ensure that HOAs have a plan, resources, and monies earmarked for ongoing planting, regular maintenance, and replacement efforts. Nature is unpredictable. An effective planting strategy must allow for unforeseen challenges and failures.

Click here to visit the Ponds & Preserves website at <https://www.rivendellcommunity.com/ponds>.